

MdZ ESTATE TOUR

STOKE - ON - TRENT

Towards Our New Architecture
A Séance in One Act

by Anna Francis and Rebecca Davies
(The Portland Inn Project)



ESTATE PUBLICATIONS

Towards Our New Architecture

As I lay on the bed this morning, feeding my daughter, I was planning a new architecture. It was an architecture of mothers, daughters, sisters, aunties.

We wanted to talk about soft things; flesh, muscle, the curve of a stomach, the ligaments and tendons that hold things together.

It doesn't fit into the Masterplan, They told us.

They already had a plan for the town – it was made of brick, steel girder, concrete and glass.

There will be no Masterplan here, the women said.

The women met and we talked about the moments in between; time alone, in the bath, painted nails and children kept off school. Houses became tombs, and windows overlooked barren, barbarous streets. Stop talking about the children we said, this is our moment.

But when it came to it, planning what would happen in those streets, One woman mentioned that the hill was perfect for sledging and that the window should overlook the hill, so she could stand in the kitchen and watch the children sledging down, while she had a moment to herself.

What do you want to do in that moment?

The other women asked.

Nothing, she said.

How do we do this? We asked each other – having never planned a town before.

We will become a coven of witches, and hold a séance. We will call together the designers and the decision makers to put forward the best of their plans and we will create something new.

The Séance

Persons

The Women

Le Corbusier

Aneurin Bevan

Jane Jacobs

Alison and Peter Smithson

Act One. Scene 1.

One night when the moon was full and high, the women came together, in a house on a street, in the neighbourhood.

The Women. We summon the spirits of housing development, architecture, policy and planning!

The Women. Welcome Le!!!

Le Corbusier. My name is Charles-Édouard.

The Women. Nye Bevan! You made it!

Aneurin Bevan. Wouldn't miss this for the world.

The Women. Jane – thank you for coming.

Jane Jacobs. Pleasure, women.

The Women. Alison and Peter!

The Smithsons. Hello!

The Women. We have brought you here to request your visions for our neighbourhood. There has been a palpable shift in how we feel about the places we live, work and play; there is a need for something different. We have felt trapped in our homes and crave togetherness.

They have tasked us with rewriting the plan and we call on you and your ideas to help us draw this plan to represent us, our needs and our neighbourhood.

Le Corbusier. I can help you with that – Firstly I suggest standardised dwellings, equal sized, beautifully designed spaces for living in. Functional. A rejection of the chaos of the street!

The Women. You are putting forward a sterile vision for our neighbourhood. We are not robots. We would like to ask; do you have children? Do you understand that you cannot shut chaos out by closing the front door? And how will these dwellings age as we get older and our children grow up? Everything in your plan looks the same – like a spreadsheet.

Aneurin Bevan. And this is exactly what I didn't want for my vision for social housing. Better to have different shaped spaces, different architectures – social house beside town house, green spaces – a mix of people from society, a range of classes together is the ideal.

The Smithsons. We look at the whole habitat – like Bevan proposed. Thinking about all the elements of the neighbourhood being a part of the ecology. From belonging comes the enriching sense of neighbourliness. We believe we are putting into practice those ideals that Nye held high.

Aneurin Bevan. We have been the dreamers. We have been the sufferers. Now we are the builders.

The Smithsons. Our aim is not to theorise but to build - only through construction can a utopia of the present be realised.

The Women. But we are not just designing for the present. Our design needs to have space to accommodate the will of the children; progress. We believe that architecture should be about designing and creating SPACE – use for now, but also use for the future. Is there room in the plan for the next generation?

Jane Jacobs. The next generation needs to be a part of the decision making and the design. Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.

Le Corbusier. I have spoken about dwellings, but I am not just talking about designing a building. My proposal is for architecture as an economic and political tool that can be used to improve the world through the iconic buildings we design and through MY... sorry! OUR plan.

The Women. Have you designed something that is so immovable that the only option is to knock it down if it doesn't work? We don't want a monument to ourselves - we want to build space for everyone.

Le Corbusier. Ah but I am designing a utopia!

Jane Jacobs. Or a Dystopia!?

The Women. Would YOU live here Le?! We want to move away from polarised words like 'utopia' and 'dystopia'. We have lived through the failures of your utopian dream. We talk about 'ideals' only because we have been living in an environment that is not ideal – what has been produced is sub-standard and often dangerous.

Is it so much to ask for representation? Care? That design be collaborative and sustain a range of futures? We have appreciated hearing your voices, because it has made us recognise the power of our own.

This is not an architecture of bricks and mortar – for us, architecture is the space between us and WE are the architects of our own lives.

(BLACKOUT)

Act One. Scene 2.

The Women are preparing for an event in the newly renovated Portland Inn.

(CURTAIN)

Written by Anna Francis and Rebecca Davies, lead artists of The Portland Inn Project – community led change for a neighbourhood in Stoke on Trent.



AIRSPACE

L-13